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THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART EXHIBITS
PHOTOGRAPHS OF CLARENCE H. WHITE

The photographs of Clarence H. White (1871-1925), an Ohio born artist and important figure in the early pictorial photographic movement, will be on display at The Cleveland Museum of Art from July 5 through August 13. The collection of over seventy-five photographs, carefully composed yet subtly lyric landscapes and portraits, is loaned by the Museum of Modern Art and is the most comprehensive retrospective showing of White's work since 1926.

Clarence White, born in West Carlisle, Ohio, was originally a bookkeeper in a wholesale grocery business. He became interested in photography at the age of twenty-three and, with no formal training, achieved, by 1899, world-wide recognition for his simple, poetic genre studies. In 1906 White left Ohio to join the faculty of Teachers College, Columbia University, instructing the first formal photography course ever offered there.

As one of the founding members of the Photo-Secession organized by Alfred Steiglitz in 1902, White was called the "peaceful warrior" because of his firm rather than belligerent endorsement of photography as a creative art not hand-maiden to pictorialism. He taught for several years at the Brooklyn Institute and the Brooklyn Museum, spending summers in Georgetown, Maine, and, in 1914, he founded the Clarence H. White School of Photography in New York City. Among his most noted students were Anton Bruehl, Margaret Bourke-White, and Dorothea Lange.

Throughout his life White remained active in photographic organization. As founder and first president of the Pictorial Photographers of America, he became one of the most influential artists in the "coming of age" of photography. White died in 1925 while leading a student tour in Mexico.

Clarence White approached photography as the "exploration of the familiar", and his pictures reflect his understanding of composition which transcended the limited validity of mere record. He was inspired by the delicacy of the oriental print and by the European modernists through his knowledge of the painters Whistler, Sargent, and Chase; but, it was the popular genre illustrators of the late nineteenth century who left the most profound mark upon White's work. His first studies were simple daily scenes of his own youth: young girls reading or playing blind man's bluff, women gathering apple blossoms, and mystical apparitions of the landscape; and though his work evolved into a more pure form of portraiture and landscape study, he never broke entirely from pictorial conventions. Most of White's prints, done in the once popular platinum medium, reveal a gently luminous and natural ambience which grants them a place in the "Classical Era" of photography.

After leaving Cleveland, the exhibition will be seen at the Krannert Art Museum, Champaign, Illinois; the Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia; Ohio University (where Clarence White, Jr. has resided as Chairman of the Photography Department since 1949), and the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts.

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